

**Nursing and Midwifery Council
Fitness to Practise Committee**

**Substantive Order Review Hearing
Thursday, 14 May 2026**

Virtual Hearing

Name of Registrant: Sarah Vega Oakes

NMC PIN: 15I0200E

Part(s) of the register: Registered Nurse – Adult
RNA – 23 September 2015

Relevant Location: Knowsley

Type of case: Conviction

Panel members: Rachel Forster (Chair, Lay member)
Diane Gow (Registrant member)
Nicola Strother Smith (Lay member)

Legal Assessor: Fiona Barnett

Hearings Coordinator: Hamizah Sukiman

Nursing and Midwifery Council: Represented by James Holloway, Case Presenter

Mrs Oakes: Present and represented by Tope Adeyemi, instructed by Thompsons Solicitors

Order being reviewed: Suspension order (7 months)

Fitness to practise: Impaired

Outcome: **Suspension order (6 months) to come into effect at the end of 31 May 2026 in accordance with Article 30 (1)**

Decision and reasons on application for hearing to be held partly in private

At the outset of the hearing, Ms Adeyemi, on your behalf, made an application for this case to be held partly in private on the basis that references will be made to your health and the health of your family members. The application was made pursuant to Rule 19 of the 'Nursing and Midwifery Council (Fitness to Practise) Rules 2004', as amended ('the Rules').

Mr Holloway, on behalf of the Nursing and Midwifery Council ('NMC'), did not oppose the application.

The legal assessor reminded the panel that while Rule 19(1) provides, as a starting point, that hearings shall be conducted in public, Rule 19(3) states that the panel may hold hearings partly or wholly in private if it is satisfied that this is justified by the interests of any party, third party or by the public interest.

Having heard that there will be reference to your health and the health of your family members, the panel determined to go into private session as and when such issues are raised in order to protect your and your family members' privacy.

Decision and reasons on review of the substantive order

The panel decided to impose a further period of suspension for six months.

This order will come into effect at the end of 31 May 2026 in accordance with Article 30(1) of the 'Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001' ('the Order').

This is the second review of a substantive suspension order originally imposed for a period of 12 months by a Fitness to Practise Committee panel on 3 October 2024. This was reviewed on 7 October 2025 and the reviewing Fitness to Practise Committee panel imposed a further 7-month period of suspension.

The current order is due to expire at the end of 31 May 2026. The panel is reviewing the order pursuant to Article 30(1) of the Order.

The charge found proved by way of admission which resulted in the imposition of the substantive order was as follows:

'That you, a registered nurse,

- 1. On 26 March 2024 at North Cheshire Magistrates' Court were convicted of 2 charges of dishonestly making a false representation to make a gain for yourself/another or causing loss to another/exposing another to risk, contrary to section 2 of the Fraud Act 2006.*

AND in light of the above, your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your conviction.'

The last reviewing panel determined the following with regard to impairment:

'... At this hearing the panel in its deliberations took into account the submissions made on your behalf and the documentation you provided, including your reflection, and testimonials. It noted that you have expressed remorse for your actions and accept that your conduct was wrong. The panel was of the view that although your reflection demonstrates developing insight, particularly in understanding of the personal consequences of your behaviour, it was self-focused and did not sufficiently address the impact of your conduct on the profession, your colleagues or public confidence.

The panel noted the absence of evidence of meaningful remediation in a professional context. While you have complied with the requirements of your suspended sentence and undertaken rehabilitative work through probation, there was no evidence that you had undertaken any continuing professional development (CPD) relevant to nursing, or activities aimed at maintaining your professional knowledge and skills during the period of suspension.

The original panel was unable to conclude that you were not liable to repeat matters of the kind found proved. Today's panel considered that your dishonesty arose in

the context of [PRIVATE] and limited support. It noted that several of these factors remain present. The panel acknowledged that your engagement with probation and external support services indicates progress. However, it was not satisfied that you have developed or demonstrated enough coping mechanisms to prevent reoccurrence should similar pressures arise in the future. In light of this, this panel therefore determined that there remains a real, albeit reduced, risk of repetition.

The panel considered your previous dishonest conduct and noted it represents a serious departure from the standards expected of a registered nurse. The panel also had regard to your criminal sentence and considered that members of the public would be concerned if you were permitted to return to unrestricted practice at this stage, particularly whilst still serving a sentence for criminal dishonesty. The panel has borne in mind that its primary function is to protect patients and the wider public interest which includes maintaining confidence in the nursing profession and upholding proper standards of conduct and performance. The panel determined that, in this case, a finding of continuing impairment on public interest grounds is required.

For these reasons, the panel finds that your fitness to practise remains impaired.'

The last reviewing panel determined the following with regard to sanction:

'The panel considered the imposition of a further period of suspension. It was of the view that a suspension order would allow you further time to fully reflect on your previous conviction. It considered that you need to gain a full understanding of how the dishonesty of one nurse can impact upon the nursing profession as a whole and the organisation that the individual nurse is working for.

The panel concluded that a further 7-month suspension order would be the appropriate and proportionate response and would afford you adequate time to further develop your insight and take steps to strengthen your practice. It would also give you an opportunity to approach health professionals and current employers to attest to your honesty and integrity in the workplace since the substantive hearing.

The panel determined therefore that a suspension order is the appropriate sanction which would continue to both protect the public and satisfy the wider public interest. Accordingly, the panel determined that imposing a suspension order for the period of 7 months would provide you with an opportunity to engage with the NMC and develop deeper insight into your past failings. It considered this to be the most appropriate and proportionate sanction available.'

Decision and reasons on current impairment

The panel has considered carefully whether your fitness to practise remains impaired. Whilst there is no statutory definition of fitness to practise, the NMC has defined fitness to practise as the ability of a professional on our register to practise as a nurse, midwife or nursing associate safely and effectively without restriction. In considering this case, the panel has carried out a comprehensive review of the order in light of the current circumstances. Whilst it has noted the decision of the last panel, this panel has exercised its own judgement as to current impairment.

The panel has had regard to all of the documentation before it as well as the submissions made by Mr Holloway and Ms Adeyemi.

Mr Holloway outlined the background of this case, including its procedural history. In respect of today's hearing, he reminded the panel that the persuasive burden is on you to demonstrate that your fitness to practise is no longer impaired. He referred the panel to the documentation you provided, which included a reflective piece, screenshots of your job applications, online and video reading which you have undertaken as well as information on your current health. He addressed the panel on each of these in turn.

In respect of the reflective piece, Mr Holloway submitted that whilst you accepted forging sick notes, you continue to deny the forging of a reference, stating that you only pleaded guilty based on legal advice you received at the time of the original Magistrates Court hearing. He submitted that you referred to the life pressures that you had at the relevant time, and you described your actions as a "*mistake in judgement*", and that you were stuck in a difficult position at the time.

Mr Holloway also referred the panel to your job applications, three of which are for paid employment and one of which was a voluntary post. He further referred the panel to the free videos and reading you have done to keep up to date with your practice, as well as the character references you provided. He submitted that all of the character references describe your criminal convictions as “*allegations*”, and he drew particular attention to the character reference provided by your neighbour, which described the convictions as “*simply not true*”.

In respect of impairment, Mr Holloway submitted that you have not sufficiently addressed the concerns identified by the last reviewing panel. Whilst the reflective piece is promising, having referred to the NMC Code of Conduct and the impact of your actions on your colleagues and the wider profession, Mr Holloway submitted that this reflection lacks depth. He submitted that, by describing your actions as a “*mistake in judgement*”, you have not accepted and addressed your past conduct, and you seek to minimise it. He further submitted that your reference to situational factors at the time and your continued denial of the forged references is indicative of an ongoing denial of responsibility on your part. He invited the panel to find that your reflective piece is insufficient to demonstrate that you have full insight into your conduct.

Mr Holloway further submitted that the online reading and YouTube videos are insufficient to demonstrate continuing professional development and keeping up to date with your skills. He submitted that the YouTube videos address basic first aid, as opposed to sophisticated nursing practice. He submitted that there is no evidence of you completing formal, professional training, and you have not made a concerted effort to maintain your clinical knowledge.

In respect of the job applications, Mr Holloway submitted that only three of these roles are for paid employment, and there remains no information from you as to your relocation plans to Scotland, which was referenced by the last reviewing panel.

Taking into account all of the above, Mr Holloway invited the panel to make a finding of impairment on public interest grounds. He submitted that your conduct in misappropriating NHS funds for personal financial gain is very serious, and members of the public would be alarmed by the findings. He submitted that a finding of impairment remains necessary to

maintain professional standards and uphold public confidence in the nursing profession and the NMC as its regulator. He further invited the panel to consider dishonesty in a wider sense, and its potential impact on patient safety.

Mr Holloway addressed the panel on the available sanctions before it, and he submitted that neither taking no action nor imposing a caution order would be appropriate in this case, given the seriousness of your conduct. He further submitted that no workable conditions could be devised, given the conduct relates to your attitude and character, as opposed to your clinical skills. In these circumstances, he submitted that a conditions of practice order would also be inappropriate.

Mr Holloway submitted that a further period of suspension may allow you the opportunity to fully reflect upon your conduct and demonstrate full insight and remediation into your failings. However, he referred the panel to the NMC Guidance, '*Removal from the register when there is a substantive order in place*' (Rev-2h), and he reminded the panel that suspension orders are not designed to exist indefinitely. He submitted that it is both in the public interest and in your interest to not be kept in limbo, and that you must either be allowed to practise without restriction or leave the register.

Mr Holloway addressed the panel on a striking-off order, and he submitted that it is open to today's panel to remove you from the nursing register. He submitted that this would be a matter for the panel, but that at its very least, a further period of suspension is necessary given your lack of in-depth insight at this stage.

Ms Adeyemi invited the panel to either lift the current suspension order, or allow the suspension order to lapse. She submitted that you have completed all aspects of your criminal sentence, and you have abided by the NMC suspension order for a period of approximately 18 months. She submitted that you are no longer impaired, and any further period of suspension would be purely punitive.

Ms Adeyemi submitted that you have consistently demonstrated remorse, and you have never sought to go behind the conviction. You accepted your criminal sentence, and she submitted that it is open for you to continue expressing your views regarding the false reference, but that this does not take away from you accepting your criminal sentence.

She further submitted that the references made to your personal circumstances in your reflective piece should not be interpreted as selfish, as it would not be possible for you to come to terms with your conduct without addressing your health and your private life. She submitted that this is relevant context to your situation, and it is not to shift the focus from your conduct to what you were experiencing.

Ms Adeyemi submitted that you have expressed shame as to your conduct, and you accept that it was unacceptable. She submitted that you have recognised the impact of your actions on your colleagues, in abandoning them when you were not at work, and the wider nursing profession, and your breach of the NMC Code of Conduct. She further submitted that you also recognised the impact of your actions upon the public, and patients' families. In particular, she submitted that you regret any apprehension that members of the public may experience in seeking healthcare services as a result of your conduct and the subsequent disrepute you have brought the nursing profession. She submitted that you accept that you broke the trust the public had in you, and your actions did not promote professionalism. Ms Adeyemi also referred the panel to your recognition of the steps you should have taken instead.

Ms Adeyemi further submitted that a reflection is not an exercise in perfection, and she accepted that there is always more to be said. However, she submitted that you have consistently engaged with these proceedings, you have pleaded guilty and you have abided by the suspension order. She submitted that you have identified the seriousness of your conduct, its impact upon your colleagues, the wider nursing profession and members of the public, and the steps you should have taken instead.

In respect of your current situation, Ms Adeyemi submitted that [PRIVATE]. She further submitted that you completed your probation order in August 2025, and you completed your suspended criminal sentence on 2 May 2026. You have not yet secured work, but you are currently attending a job centre to explore opportunities available to you and that you have a job coach. Ms Adeyemi submitted that, notwithstanding your job search in other areas of work, your hope is to return to nursing.

Ms Adeyemi submitted that you have completed extensive reading to keep up to date with your clinical skills, and the videos you have watched are both from the NMC and the Royal

College of Nursing ('RCN') to keep up to date with your emergency practices and acute illness management. She submitted that [PRIVATE] you have been unable to complete formal training, but you have found the free resources helpful. Ms Adeyemi also submitted that you have explored options in respect of completing a Return to Practice course.

In respect of the character references, Ms Adeyemi submitted that you are unsure as to why the language used describes your conviction as allegations, but you have been open and honest with those in your community regarding your conviction.

Taking all this into account, Ms Adeyemi submitted that, whilst the conduct was serious and let the nursing profession down, the conduct was from 2019 and you have completed your suspended criminal sentence. Prior to your NMC suspension in 2024, she submitted that you worked with no issues arising in respect of your honesty or clinical practice. She submitted that you are determined to be an asset to the profession, and you would like the ability to develop yourself and move on with your career. She invited the panel to find that you are no longer impaired.

The panel asked Ms Adeyemi regarding your guilty plea to the conviction for the forged reference, where in you denied the underlying conduct. In response, Ms Adeyemi submitted that you were concerned by the cost of contesting the allegations, and you wanted the matter to conclude at the Magistrates Court. This informed your decision to plead guilty, and she submitted that you accept this conviction.

On your application to join the Community Payback Scheme and to train as a probation officer, Ms Adeyemi submitted that your applications for these roles were not successful as you were, at the time, still subject to a suspended criminal sentence. This sentence concluded on 2 May 2026. She submitted you wanted the opportunity to act in the public interest.

In respect of the support you are currently receiving, Ms Adeyemi described your difficult personal circumstances at the time, which contributed to your conduct. However, you now possess a strong support network, [PRIVATE]. She also described how you now have the confidence to approach senior colleagues, Human Resources and Occupational Health, should this scenario arise again.

In respect of bullying at work, Ms Adeyemi submitted that you had been ostracised by your colleagues and became the subject of gossip due to [PRIVATE] other elements of your personal life. She submitted that you were not the only victim of this bullying culture, but that you did not wish to dwell on it. She told the panel that you have been unable to secure positive references from colleagues you had worked with in the past, as they do not wish to associate with you following your conviction. She submitted that you had attempted to access your past appraisal and training records but have been unable to do so. However, she submitted that no concerns were raised in respect of your clinical practice.

The panel heard and accepted the advice of the legal assessor.

In reaching its decision, the panel was mindful of the need to protect the public, maintain public confidence in the profession and to declare and uphold proper standards of conduct and performance.

The panel considered whether your fitness to practise remains impaired.

The panel noted that the last reviewing panel found that you had developing insight, albeit '*self-focused*' and that it had not sufficiently addressed the impact of your actions on your colleagues, the nursing profession or public confidence.

Today's panel had sight of your reflective account, where you expressed remorse, regret and some understanding of the implications of your actions. You described the support mechanisms that you now have in place should you find yourself in a similar situation. The panel was of the view that your reflective piece begins to address the points outlined by the previous reviewing panel, and found your insight to be developing. It noted Ms Adeyemi's submissions that a reflective piece does not have to be perfect. However, the panel determined that your reflective piece is insufficiently detailed, and does not address your dishonest conduct in sufficient depth. The panel was encouraged by the insight you have shown since the last review, but it determined that your insight needs to develop further, be more in-depth and convincingly applied in order for the panel to conclude that your fitness to practise is no longer impaired.

The panel also considered the online reading and videos that you have watched to keep up to date with your clinical skills. Whilst the panel accepted Ms Adeyemi's submissions regarding [PRIVATE] your inability to enrol onto paid training courses, the panel was of the view that the learning you have embarked upon is insufficiently advanced for the continuing development of your nursing skills. It was at too basic and rudimentary a level. Further, the panel had no reflections from you to show what you have learned through the reading and videos, or how you would embed these into your future nursing practice. The panel was of the view that deeper, more rigorous and advanced courses and webinars would need to be completed and reflected upon before it can be satisfied that you have kept up to date with your clinical knowledge.

Similarly, the panel noted that you have taken preliminary steps towards enquiring about a Return to Practice Course.

In respect of the character references, the panel considered that none of the references were professional or employment-related references. The panel was of the view that this is of limited weight in assessing your fitness to practise as a registered nurse. The panel noted that you have not been in paid employment since the imposition of the suspension order, in part due to your suspended criminal sentence (which completed on 2 May 2026). The panel acknowledged that this may have hindered some of your opportunities.

Taking all the above into account, the panel is encouraged by your continued engagement with the NMC process and your developing level of insight. However, it determined that you have not yet fully remediated the concerns, as your reflection lacks depth as to your dishonest conduct and its full impact in terms of how it undermines the trust and professional relationship with patients, their families, those engaging with the service as well as colleagues. Further, it has no information before it suggesting that you have sufficiently kept your clinical knowledge up to date at this stage. The panel therefore determined that members of the public would not be confident in your return to unrestricted practice at this time. The panel determined that, although the risk has reduced since the last review, there remains a risk to public confidence.

The panel has borne in mind that its primary function is to protect patients and the wider public interest which includes maintaining confidence in the nursing profession and

upholding proper standards of conduct and performance. The panel determined that, in this case and given your developing insight thus far, a finding of continuing impairment on public interest grounds is required.

The panel bore in mind Mr Holloway's submissions regarding the potential wider public protection implications as a result of your conduct. Based on all the information before it, the panel determined there was no evidence before it to support an assertion that you pose a risk to the public at this stage. Accordingly, the panel does not find your fitness to practise to be impaired on public protection grounds.

For these reasons, the panel finds that your fitness to practise remains impaired on public interest grounds only.

Decision and reasons on sanction

Having found your fitness to practise currently impaired, the panel then considered what, if any, sanction it should impose in this case. The panel noted that its powers are set out in Article 30 of the Order. The panel has also taken into account the 'NMC's Sanctions Guidance' (SG) and has borne in mind that the purpose of a sanction is not to be punitive, though any sanction imposed may have a punitive effect.

The panel first considered whether to take no action but concluded that this would be inappropriate in view of the seriousness of the case. The panel decided that it would be neither proportionate nor in the public interest to take no further action.

It then considered the imposition of a caution order but again determined that, due to the seriousness of the case, an order that does not restrict your practice would not be appropriate in the circumstances. The panel considered that your conduct involved dishonesty for financial gain, and this was not at the lower end of the spectrum. Consequently, the panel determined that it would be neither proportionate nor in the public interest to impose a caution order.

The panel next considered whether a conditions of practice on your registration would be a sufficient and appropriate response. The panel is mindful that any conditions imposed

must be proportionate, measurable and workable. The panel bore in mind that the concern relates to your dishonest conduct, as opposed to your clinical practice. The panel determined that no workable conditions could be devised to monitor and assess your honesty and integrity, and that these are matters of professionalism and character. The panel therefore determined that a conditions of practice order would be inappropriate in these circumstances, as any conditions imposed would not directly address the relevant concerns.

The panel considered the imposition of a further period of suspension. It had regard to the NMC Guidance, '*Suspension order*' (SAN-2d), which stated:

- ...
- *will suspension be sufficient to protect people using services, public confidence in the profession, or professional standards?*
- *is it realistic that the professional could return to unrestricted practice in the future, even if it is not appropriate for them to do so now?*
- *What would the registrant need to do in order to be fit to practise in the future? Is it realistic that they will be able to do this?*

The panel considered the above points.

The panel was satisfied that a suspension order would be sufficient to protect public confidence in the profession and maintain professional standards. The panel determined that, based on the progress you have shown so far, members of the public are suitably protected and the public interest would be satisfied if you remain temporarily removed from the register until you can demonstrate your fitness to practise. Simultaneously, the panel was satisfied that the public interest can be met with a temporary, as opposed to permanent, removal from the nursing register, in light of the progress you continue to demonstrate.

In assessing whether it would be realistic for you to return to unrestricted practice, and the steps you would need to take to achieve this, the panel considered Ms Adeyemi's submissions of the difficulties you are facing, particularly with employment, due to your

suspended criminal sentence. The panel heard that the sentence was completed on 2 May 2026. The panel noted this was approximately two weeks prior to today's hearing.

The panel considered its findings above in respect of your current impairment, and your continued development of your insight and remediation. Whilst you are currently still impaired, the panel was of the view that you have demonstrated progress since the last review hearing. The panel also bore in mind that you continue to engage with these proceedings. Taking all the above into account, it was of the view that a suspension order would allow you further time to fully reflect on your previous dishonesty. It considered that you need to gain a full understanding of how dishonesty of one nurse can impact upon the nursing profession as a whole and not just the organisation that the individual nurse is working for as well as a full understanding of the impact of your dishonesty on the nurse-patient relationship, and public perception of nurses.

Further, the panel also bore in mind that a further period of suspension would give you time to obtain further references from those who know you in a professional capacity (in either paid employment or voluntary role or those who have supported you through your probation period, such as your probation officer or job coach) to attest to your honesty and integrity.

The panel was also of the view that a further period of suspension would allow you to take proactive steps to keep up to date with your clinical knowledge, by undertaking reading and accessing free courses or professional webinars online and reflecting upon how that learning could be embedded into your future practice.

Bearing all the above in mind, the panel therefore determined that a suspension order is the appropriate sanction which would continue to satisfy the wider public interest. Accordingly, the panel decided to impose a suspension order for the period of six months to provide you with sufficient time to demonstrate your full insight and remediation and show the proactive steps you have taken to keep your clinical skills and professional knowledge up to date. It considered this to be the most appropriate and proportionate sanction available.

The panel determined that a striking-off order would be disproportionate at this stage, in light of your developing insight and continued engagement with the NMC process.

This suspension order will take effect upon the expiry of the current suspension order, namely the end of 31 May 2026 in accordance with Article 30(1).

Before the end of the period of suspension, another panel will review the order. At the review hearing the panel may revoke the order, or it may extend the order, or it may replace the order with another order.

Any future panel reviewing this case would be assisted by:

- Your continued engagement with the NMC process, and your participation in any future review hearing;
- A further reflective piece demonstrating further insight into the impact of your conviction for dishonesty on patients, colleagues, and confidence in the nursing profession, referring specifically to your dishonest conduct;
- Evidence of steps taken to maintain or update your clinical and professional knowledge through deeper, more rigorous and advanced courses and webinars, as well as reflections on your learning, and how it will be embedded into your nursing practice;
- Character and/or employment references from those who know you in a professional capacity (either in paid employment or in voluntary roles or those who have supported you through your probation period, such as your probation officer or job coach), attesting to your honesty and integrity.

This will be confirmed to you in writing.

That concludes this determination.